

FIRE SAFETY GUIDE

Seattle Fire Department

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Fire Prevention Division

***For Owners and Managers of
Multi-Occupancy Residences***



Public Education Section

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386-1337



Revised 1/02

Introduction

Without even realizing it many of the unrealistic images we see on television become reality to us. Most people do not even realize how inaccurate their ideas of fire may be. The fire used by television producers is nothing like what a real fire may be like. Real fires produce large amounts of thick, black smoke that obscures vision, causes nausea and may even lead to unconsciousness or death. Smoke is full of toxic by-products, including carbon monoxide. These poisonous gases are responsible for most deaths and injuries in fires, not the flames. Real fire grows very quickly.

Escape must be quick, there is no time for heroics. This lesson is learned time and time again. The information in this handbook is based on lessons the fire service and residential property owners have learned over the years. Reading this handbook will help you and others who have responsibility for apartment and condominium buildings and other public occupancies in the City of Seattle better understand what you can do to prepare, prevent and react to fire emergencies.

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Seattle Fire Code Article 13

□ **Definition**

Article 13 of the Seattle Fire Code sets minimum standards for fire emergency procedures in apartments, condominiums, and other public assembly occupancies.

□ **Regulates mainly through two areas:**

□ Fire Emergency Guide - The procedures to be followed by staff and occupants when reporting a fire emergency, the method of evacuation, a suggested outside meeting place, and the survival behaviors for individuals unable to exit.

Exemptions:

1. Buildings with direct exiting from each unit with one-hour separation and no common hallways
2. One-story buildings with an interior hallway, that serves no more than four dwelling units
3. Two-story buildings with open balconies and open stairways
4. Two-story buildings with interior stairways which serve no more than four dwelling units, (two units at the top of the stairs and two units are at the bottom of the stairs)
5. Buildings three stories or less in height with open balconies and enclosed stairways

□ Staff Fire Drills - Coordination between management and staff to hold "employee only" fire drill on quarterly basis.

Exemption:

Apartment buildings without full-time staff are not required to conduct fire drills.

Outline For A Fire Emergency Guide

Section 1303.3.5.3.1 of the Seattle Fire Code states that "A fire emergency guide shall be provided for apartment buildings which describes the location, function and use of all fire-protection equipment and appliances accessible to tenants, including fire alarm systems, single-station smoke detectors and portable fire extinguishers. The guide shall also include an emergency evacuation plan for each dwelling unit."

□ **The basic objectives of the Fire Emergency Guide are:**

- To describe the location and function of fire protection equipment accessible to tenants.
- To provide tenants with suggested emergency evacuation procedures from their individual units.

□ **The Fire Emergency Guide must reflect the needs of the building.**

- It is important to evaluate the needs of your tenants and the building which they live in to design the appropriate messages for their Fire Emergency Guide.
- Any additional fire safety and prevention information you wish to provide your tenants is up to you. The listing of Seattle Fire Department Resources will help you to determine the appropriate messages to share with your building.

□ **Sample Fire Emergency Guide**

The following page has a sample fire emergency guide, intended for your use when designing the guide your tenants will receive.

SAMPLE FLOOR PLAN

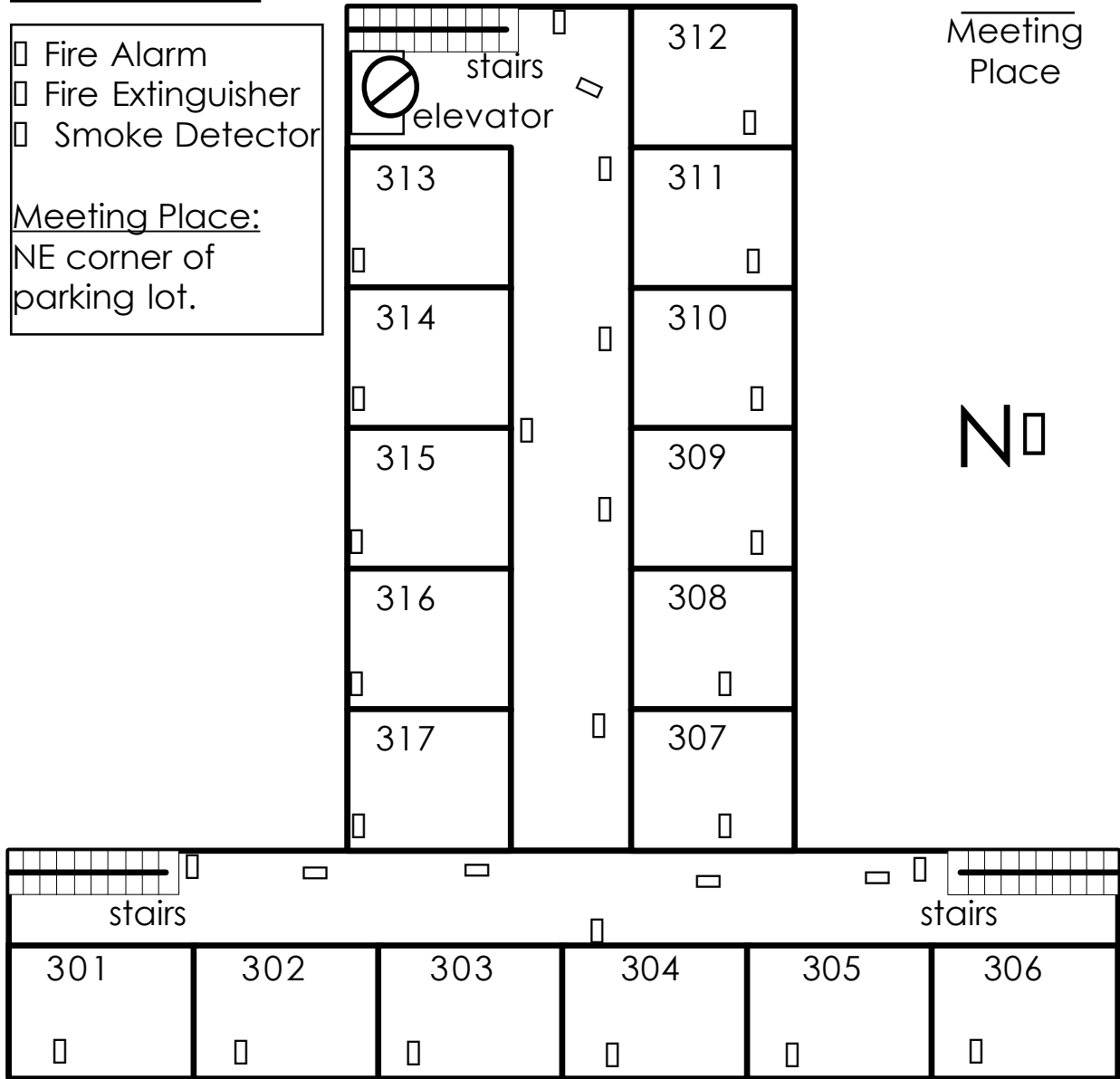
- Fire Alarm
- Fire Extinguisher
- Smoke Detector

Meeting Place:
NE corner of
parking lot.

X

Meeting
Place

N



Every alarm must be treated as a fire emergency. If you hear the fire alarm take these steps to ensure a safe evacuation of the building.

- (1) Leave your unit as quickly as possible closing the doors as you go.
- (2) Use the stairs, not the elevators, to evacuate the building.
- (3) If you are unable to exit using the stairs, stay in your unit.
- (4) Once outside, move away from the building to the designated meeting place.
- (5) Do not go back into the building for any reason until the Fire Department has given permission to reenter.

Alternative Evacuation

□ **Area of Refuge**

If tenants are unable to use stairs for evacuation or if stairways and halls are filling with smoke, tenants should remain in their apartments and not attempt a risky escape. As long as the fire is not in their apartment, it may be best for them to stay in their apartment with the door closed and wait for assistance from Fire Department Personnel. Provide tenants with this alternative for evacuation:

- Close as many doors as possible between yourself and the fire will slow down the spread of smoke and flames.
- Place towels or pillows at the bottom of the door to fill any space that smoke may come through.
- Sit as close as possible to the floor where the freshest air will be. Wait for further assistance.
- Don't break the window. This could allow smoke from outside the building to fill your area of refuge.
- You can signal your location by putting something light colored and noticeable in the window to help notify the Fire Department of your presence.
- If you begin to notice smoke entering the unit or you feel that you are in danger call 911 from the phone and tell the dispatcher of your situation.

Employee(s) Duties and Training

□ **Educate staff members on emergency procedures**

- All employees must have an understanding of what specific instructions are included in their building's emergency plan.
- All fire emergencies need to be reported to the Fire Department. If an alarm is set off, call 911
- During emergency situations keep building occupants informed of the situation in order to combat the urge to panic due to the combination of fear and rumors.
- Make certain that all employees are aware of tenants with special evacuation needs.
- It is important for someone to meet the arriving Fire Department personnel and offer assistance/information when asked.



□ **Fire Drill Requirements**

Building staff will conduct and participate in fire drills on a quarterly basis for each shift, in accordance with the building's emergency plan. These drills are for the benefit of the staff and should not require the participation of residents.

□ **Conducting drills**

- Make them as realistic as possible.
- Provide incentives to participants, if possible.
- After initial drill, vary scenario to heighten interest and develop decision making skills.
- Keep a log book of drills to verify compliance.

Suggested Guidelines for Staff Fire Drills

Section 1303.6 of the Seattle Fire Code states that "Fire drills shall be conducted in a manner that provides for execution of procedures set forth in the emergency plan. In addition, fire drills shall include a review of the emergency plan and execution of assigned duties."

EXCEPTION: Apartments without a full time staff need not comply with mandatory fire drills. These apartments do need to provide tenants with a fire emergency guide with specific evacuation procedures for the building, which will be reviewed annually.

□ **Staff Fire Drills**

Staff fire drills are intended to test both the level of staff emergency preparedness and the evacuation procedures during a fire alarm situation. It is important that your staff fully understand their role in the event of a fire alarm and know what to do if you are not in the building. The following suggestions have been compiled to assist with the planning of your quarterly staff fire drills.

- Prior to any drill activity it is suggested that you start a discussion, during a staff meeting, about the evacuation procedures for your building and make certain that everyone is familiar with the details of the procedures. Answer any questions they may have pertaining to the plan and discuss any weaknesses.
- Notify members of your staff that you will be having a spontaneous fire drill sometime during the week. By using a box painted or decorated to represent fire you can "surprise" staff members. When a staff member discovers the "fire" they shall begin the drill. Whether the drill will entail simply reporting the fire to the management office or a more involved reaction, the decision is up to you.
- Have members of your staff discuss concerns they have about the evacuation procedures and role play different situations that could happen during a fire emergency.
- The drill for your building could also include pulling one of the fire alarms in the building and monitoring the reaction of staff to the situation. If your building fire alarm is monitored, notify the monitoring company of the drill immediately prior to its occurrence. You also must notify the alarm company when the drill is completed. There is no need to notify the Fire Department.

□ **Notification**

It is recommended that you notify tenants if the audible alarms will be sounded for the staff fire drill and invite them to participate.

Fire Protection Equipment & Systems

The building owner is responsible for Seattle Fire Code Section 1001.5.1, insuring that fire and life safety systems are maintained and in operable condition at all times. Your building may contain some of these systems.

□ **Fire Alarm System**

INITIATING DEVICE

Initiates alarm signal

Ex: smoke detector, heat detector, sprinkler flow switch, manual pull station

CONTROL UNIT

Fire alarm panel, usually located in lobby, management office or equipment room. May be able to show where the alarm originated.

NOTIFICATION DEVICE

Alerts building occupants to the alarm.

Ex: alarm horns, strobe lights, bells

□ **Central Station Monitoring Company**

24 - hour monitoring company that relays fire alarms from a contracted building to the 911 center. Not required for smaller apartment buildings and those without sprinklers.

□ **Elevator Recall**

Even though this is not a requirement for most apartments, tenants and staff should understand that during a fire, elevators should not be used by occupants of the building.

- Elevators may fail, and trap occupants.
- Elevators may be needed by the Fire Department.
- Smoke may travel up the elevator shaft and injure occupants.

□ **Standpipes**

Water pipe in stairwell or attached to the exterior of the building that supplies water for firefighting operations.

□ **Exits**

Most buildings will have two exit stairwells, entered into through self-closing, fire rated doors. At least one of these stairwells will exit to the outside of the building.

AUTOMATIC CLOSING DOORS

Doors leading into stairwells are required to be self-closing, self-latching, fire-rated doors. These doors need to be closed at all times because they will help control the spread of smoke and flames.

□ **Portable Fire Extinguishers**

At a minimum one 2A fire extinguisher must be stored in an identified location on normal travel routes on every floor (up to 6,000 square feet and not more than 75 feet travel distance from anywhere on the floor). This requirement includes parking garages and basement storage areas too.

Annual inspections and servicing of fire extinguishers must be conducted by an individual certified by the Seattle Fire Department. Immediate servicing is required whenever a fire extinguisher is damaged or discharged.

It is also recommended that a staff inspection of fire extinguishers be conducted on a monthly basis.

□ **Sprinkler Systems**

Sprinkler systems are designed to control and extinguish a fire.

□ **Service and Confidence Testing**

If you have an alarm system it must be operable at all times. Make certain that the maintenance schedule for your building's fire and life safety systems is followed.

□ **Tenant Fire Hose**

Alarm Reporting

□ Treat All Alarms as Actual Emergencies

□ Automatic Alarm Reporting

□ Staff Reporting Procedures

Even though your building may be monitored by a central station company, a 911 call should be made by a designated building staff member whenever an alarm sounds. Building occupants should also be instructed to call 911 if they discover a fire and the alarm system is not yet sounding.

Post the following information next to the phone.

- nature of the emergency
 - building address & name
 - any specific information known
 - do not hang up until instructed to do so

Be prepared to provide this information to the dispatcher upon request. To help facilitate a quick response to your emergency answer the dispatcher's questions as they are asked.

□ False Alarms

If building staff determine that a fire alarm is false prior to the Fire Department's arrival, call 911 and relay the information to the dispatcher. ***Upon instruction of the fire dispatcher***, building personnel may silence the alarm. Do not reset the alarm!

The Fire Department dispatcher will notify the responding fire companies that a false alarm has been indicated. One fire company will arrive to verify that the alarm is false. Upon their instruction, the alarm may be reset.

All fire alarms will be investigated by the Seattle Fire Department. If the alarm is reset before Fire Department permission is given it may be necessary for an investigation of your entire building to verify that the alarm was in fact false.

Seattle Fire Department Inspection

Firefighters will arrive to inspect your building every other year to ensure that you are maintaining the building as required by the Seattle Fire Code. Inspectors will be looking for fire safety hazards, including those listed below.

☐ **Fire Alarm**

- ☐ Buildings with a master panel must maintain a log to verify monthly tests of the system. Log entries must show date of tests and be signed by the person conducting the test.
- ☐ In buildings without a master panel, the Inspector will witness a test of the equipment. The test shall be conducted so that the alarm is heard on all floors.

☐ **Exits**

- ☐ Signs shall be provided and maintained in working order. Signs must be clearly visible.
- ☐ Exit ways are lit in hours of darkness.
- ☐ Fire doors must close freely and completely when released, not be wedged open for convenience.
- ☐ Exit ways must not be obstructed by any means.

☐ **Fire Extinguishing Equipment**

- ☐ Fire extinguishers must be present, mounted, and operable.
- ☐ If your building requires a tenant fire hose, the required hose and controlling nozzle must be in place and accessible.

☐ **Housekeeping**

- ☐ Rubbish should be confined to approved containers and not located in exit pathways.

Inspections are a good time to develop a working relationship with the Fire Department. Ask questions and take an active role in the fire safety of your building. Inspectors will welcome the opportunity to answer specific questions pertaining to the fire safety of your building at the time of the inspection.

Decreasing the fire hazards of your building is the primary goal of the inspection program. Help us to help you and your tenants.

Common Apartment Fire Hazards

□ Common fire hazards found in apartment communities

Arson

- Keep areas around building well lit and free of materials that can burn.
- Pay special attention to security measures and report any suspicious behavior to the Police Department.

Kitchen

- Never leave cooking unattended!
- Keep cooking areas clear of things that will easily ignite.
- Put a lid on grease fires.

Electrical

- Remember that extension cords are a temporary source of electrical power.
- Electrical cords should not be run under carpets or through doorways.
- Replace cracked or broken cords.
- Unplug electrical appliances when not in use.
- Overloaded electrical sockets create a significant fire hazard.

Heating

- Allow at least three feet between portable heaters and anything that will burn.
- Unplug portable heaters whenever leaving the home or going to sleep.

Smoking

- If you smoke, do so when sitting up at a table. Never smoke when drowsy.
- Empty ash trays often, when ashes are cool, into noncombustible containers.

Garbage Disposal

- Garbage must be stored in appropriate containers in the proper locations.
- Recyclables should be stored in a secure location.

Laundry Facilities

- Lint screens need to be cleaned often.
- Provide a covered metal garbage can in the laundry facility.
- Maintain a fire extinguisher in this location.

Resident Communications

□ **Fire Emergency Guide**

- The fire emergency guide will provide your tenants with instructions to follow in the event of an alarm. In accordance with Seattle Fire Code section 1303.3.5.3, fire emergency guides shall include:
 - Procedures to follow for evacuation during a fire alarm.
 - Floor plans for the tenant to use while evacuating the building.
 - Information about accessible fire protection equipment.
 - A suggested meeting place away from the building.
 - Instructions for those tenants unable to leave their units.
- The guide shall be provided to all of your tenants, particularly to those just moving in.

□ **Provide tenants with fire safety information**

- Develop methods to inform building occupants about emergency procedures. This may be through various methods:
 - New tenant orientation.
 - Tenant preparedness seminars.
 - Resident councils, tenant safety committees.
- In addition to the activities listed above, sharing information either in a newsletter, on a community bulletin board, or during a tenant meeting can introduce your tenants to fire safety and prevention behaviors.

Seattle Fire Department Resources for Staff Training and Resident Education

□ The Public Education Section also has materials for communities with non-English speaking tenants. Fire safety posters follow a simple format using very few words and large pictures to help educate all members of your community. If you prefer, these messages can also be reproduced in small flyers using only one of the languages. Fire safety posters are available in these languages: English, Cambodian, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese.

□ The Seattle Fire Department would like to assist you in training your staff according to Article 13 of the Seattle Fire Code and your emergency plan. The Public Education Section can provide you with materials you can borrow for a period of three days to train your staff about fire safety.

□ Fire Department personnel from your local Fire Station may be able to attend a tenant safety meeting. These arrangements can be made through the Public Education Section.

□ Contact the Public Education Section of the Seattle Fire Department if you are interested in any of these materials. The phone number is 386-1337.